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# The English Leaflet

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## HOW OUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES REGARD THEIR INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH

It is, I imagine, comparatively easy for a dietitian to sit in the office adjoining his laboratory and issue bulletins which tell us exactly what we ought to eat. It is equally easy for the English staff of any school to get together and decide upon each detail of the English course. The real test of the value of these apriori directions comes after the trial—not immediately afterwards, but at some later period when subjectivity and reflection and experience have had their perfect working.

It was the recognition of this latter philosophy that prompted our Executive Committee to prepare a questionnaire that would allow a detailed analysis of the values of the various items of our instruction. The questionnaire, in reduced spacing, is reprinted on the following pages.

Copies of the questionnaire were sent to three different groups: (1) High-school graduates now in business; (2) high-school graduates now in the academic colleges; (3) high-school graduates now in advanced technical schools. The final results of the investigation of the three groups are summarized in the reports that follow. It is hoped that some investigator interested in the English work of our technical colleges will later collate the assembled data from these technical schools, here only impressionistically reviewed.

—The Editor.

## PRESENT ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUR HIGH-SCHOOL ENGLISH COURSE

The teachers of English in secondary schools desire to know how their former pupils now regard instruction and training in that subject. You are requested, in a spirit of helpfulness for future classes, to state frankly your serious and deliberate opinion.

Name of your secondary school: \_\_\_\_\_

Your present work: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Which parts of the work in English should receive most attention?

(Mark each topic with the letter which expresses your feeling. Remember that many topics means little school time for each.)

A—VERY IMPORTANT; B—IMPORTANT; C—WORTH WHILE; D—WORTH A LITTLE ATTENTION; E—BETTER OMITTED.

1. Practice in Writing

Spelling  
Punctuation  
Paragraphs  
Long Themes  
Note-taking  
Journalism  
Letters

2. Language

Grammar  
Word Study  
Paraphrase

4. Practice in Speaking

Oral Composition  
Debating  
Reading Aloud  
Silent Reading

3. Reading

Outside Reading  
Close Study of Texts  
History of Literature  
Novels  
Short Stories  
Drama  
Poetry  
Essays  
Orations  
Periodicals

5. Class Methods

Reading by Teachers  
Talks by Teachers  
Recitations  
Discussions  
Silent Reading

Do the schools need more time for English?

Should they give less time?

What results from your school work in English have proved of most value to you?

1.

2.

What parts have proved of little or no value to you?

1.

2.

What did you find most interesting or enjoyable?

1.

2.

Was the marking: Too severe? Too lenient? About right?

What personal qualities or methods of the teacher most helped you?

What habits or methods of the teacher were a hindrance or discouragement?

What would you now recommend for the last year's work in English in a secondary school?

1. Writing out of the classroom.

a. How much?

b. What kind?

c. What kind of corrections or comments should the teacher make on them?

2. Reading out of the classroom.

a. How much?

b. Of what kinds?

c. How should the teacher control or assist the pupil in this reading?

3. What should be done in the classroom?

a. Usual routine by the teacher.

b. Usual routine by the pupil.

c. Special occasional features.

4. The most important point of all.



## THE REPORT FROM THE BUSINESS GROUP

RUTH PERKINS

Lee, Higginson and Company

I am representing today approximately three hundred and twenty people who have gone through high school—in some cases gone through college. Most of them are at present holding positions of some sort or another in the business world. To my mind the opinions of these men and women are of vital importance, probably of more importance than any other group of opinions reported here today, because, after all, the schools are teaching their pupils English for the benefit it will be to them in their future lives, after their years of training are at an end. They are, it is true, at the same time laying a foundation for future knowledge and future training, but it is not until the man or woman is through schooling and carrying it into his work that he is truly able to see its benefits and its limitations.

The schools represented are many, there being a hundred and twenty-one different schools in this list; some of them in distant parts of the country. This is in itself a most interesting fact, for it shows fairly conclusively that high-school English is taught more or less the same everywhere—at least, if this is not actually true, it has received in most cases the same commendation and the same adverse criticism. It seems astonishing to me that from entirely different towns, cities, states, even from a different nation, there should be such a marked agreement in the comments made, both favorable and unfavorable.

These men and women are also in many and varied walks of life. We have received answered questionnaires from men and women in Jordan Marsh's, Filene's, Babson's Statistical Organization, Boston University School of Business Administration, Harvard School of Business Administration, Newton Hospital, Edison Electric Light Company, Atlantic Monthly Press, Newton Trust Company, and the State House. The answers are from salesgirls, nurses, statisticians, men in editorial and newspaper work, bankers, stenographers, office managers, executives, and the like, so you can readily see that the need of good English is apparently recognized by all, regardless of the position held.

You might be interested to know that the men were slightly in the minority in this list. Of those who answered the questionnaires about 35 per cent were men. But I do want to say that without their answers the task of checking up these hundreds of papers would have been a dreary and boresome one. All the criticism, or, at least, 99 per cent of it, was expressed by the men. Some of the comments were most amusing, but most of them were really constructive and sensible. They can boast of an originality and dash that were lacking in the more conservative, and perhaps considerate, reports of the feminine contingent.

As I think that this introduces the paper to some extent at least and as you have the sheet before you, I will go ahead in order of the questions given.

Which parts of the work in English should receive most attention?

	Very Important	Important	Worth While	Worth a Little Attention	Better Omitted
	A	B	C	D	E
Spelling .....	225	50	10	3	0
Punctuation .....	161	90	21	9	0
Paragraphs .....	105	87	54	18	2
Long Themes .....	29	41	79	55	49
Note-taking .....	53	68	82	46	18
Journalism .....	32	40	72	64	61
Letters .....	161	127	25	13	3
Oral Composition ..	153	85	30	7	2
Debating .....	90	108	51	27	5
Reading Aloud .....	66	94	64	29	13
Silent Reading .....	44	60	65	43	40
Grammar .....	226	37	16	8	5
Word Study .....	91	93	57	34	10
Paraphrase .....	39	66	89	51	18
Reading by Teachers	17	54	77	68	56
Talks by Teachers ..	54	102	80	33	12
Recitations .....	109	105	36	16	6
Discussions .....	141	81	36	18	5
Silent Reading .....	31	53	61	33	80
Outside Reading .....	108	85	58	17	12
Close Study of Texts	52	74	73	38	16
History of Literature	36	67	89	38	33
Novels .....	39	59	103	49	15
Short Stories .....	34	86	92	49	15
Drama .....	34	86	85	51	18
Poetry .....	39	90	86	46	15
Essays .....	40	99	81	39	9
Orations .....	33	75	87	42	15
Periodicals .....	44	60	79	39	33

On the rest of the questions I am not, in most cases, going to give any figures, for it would be impossible to give the answers in this way effectively.

**Do schools need more time for English?** 228 said yes.

**Should they give less time?** 30 said they should give less time.

**What results from your school work in English have proved of most value to you?**

1. Grammar and spelling.
2. Oral composition.

**What parts have proved of little or no value to you?**

1. Long themes.
2. Poetry—study of technique and scansion unpopular.

**What did you find most interesting or enjoyable?**

1. Discussions, debates—anything oral.
2. Outside reading—short stories favorite form of fiction.

**Was the marking: Too severe?** 17. **Too lenient?** 17. **About right?** 237.

**What personal qualities or methods of the teacher most helped you?**

1. Personal interest in pupils as individuals.
2. Several spoke of personality; one man writes, "Magnetic personality is a quality which could make even grammar interesting. It seems to me that the personality, not the method, is the important thing."
3. Interest in subject and thorough knowledge of subject.

**What habits or methods of the teacher were a hindrance or discouragement?**

Majority said nothing—some saying they had no fault whatever to find. Those who did answer the question spoke chiefly of—

1. Sarcasm.
2. Favoritism.
3. Indifference to both work and the individual.

**What would you now recommend for the last year's work in English in a secondary school?**

1. Writing out of the classroom.

- a. How much? The figure arrived at seemed to be on an average of one theme a week.
- b. What kind? Original composition—either short themes, letters, or book reports.



- c. **What kind of corrections or comments should the teacher make on them?** Nearly every person stressed corrections for accuracy in punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and grammar.

Comments made should be favorable as well as unfavorable.

## 2. Reading out of the classroom.

- a. **How much?** Nearly all said as much as possible—many suggesting a book a month.
- b. **Of what kinds?** All agreed on variety—fiction, both standard and modern, biographies, periodicals.
- c. **How should the teacher control or assist the pupil in this reading?** Most popular method is that teacher have a list of 100 names, kept thoroughly up-to-date, from which the pupil is allowed to choose whichever book he pleases, and that book reports should be required.

## 3. What should be done in the classroom?

- a. **Usual routine by the teacher.** Majority answered nothing. Those who did, answered, I should say, the only reasonable one—review of past lesson, lesson for the day, and explanation of work for following day.
- b. **Usual routine by the pupil.** So few answered it is impossible to give a report. One mentioned that "a" would naturally take care of "b".
- c. **Special occasional features.** Debates most popular. Current topics, short dramatized plays mentioned.

4. **The most important point of all.** The most popular phrase was either "knowledge of the English language" or "knowledge of grammar." One man states, "The most important point is grammar, but I didn't know enough to appreciate it when studying; it wasn't made interesting." Another says, "The most important point is a real knowledge of the fundamentals, a complete command of speech which can only come from the knowledge of English language." Another says, "The most important point is to give the pupil a good foundation in English upon which he can build."

In summing up this report, I think the outstanding features are these:

In the first place, everyone agrees that English is absolutely essential in the training of the young person and that more time should be given to the study of it. I do not know what any one of them would suggest that any other subject be dropped or even cut in order that more English be taught, so, in that case, the only way to have more English would be to have a longer school day. One might know that most of those writing the reports were out of school and will not

have to worry about having their day lengthened. I do believe, however, that they feel, without knowing how it can be accomplished, that more time should be given to this most important study.

In the second place, aversion to poetry as it is taught today seems to stand out prominently. After reading these papers I feel that the people do not object to the learning of poetry, the study of it for its worth, thought, beauty, but they believe that it is a real waste of valuable time and energy, when there is so much time to learn and such a short time to learn it in, to study the structure of poetry, the mechanics of it. To the boy or girl who will never write poetry, any further study of it than that which will give an appreciation of it seems worthless. To some I fear this may seem deplorable, may cause real sorrow that the teaching of poetry today is neither appreciated nor popular, but to others I am sure that this criticism has its value.

In the third place, the pupils who have graduated are not "poor sports." Some of them no doubt received very low marks in English, possibly many failed, yet all of them are quite willing to admit that they got only what was coming to them and that the teacher was just and fair in marking. And when you note that as many said "too lenient" as "too severe" the shock is almost more than one should be expected to stand; 237 in favor of the marking against 17 who felt it was too severe is significant; it goes to show furthermore that these questionnaires have all been answered in an open-minded and thoroughly honest manner.

In the fourth place, pupils apparently like to hear themselves talk. It evidently gives them actual pleasure to do oral work of some sort, whether it is debating, discussing, or giving oral themes. I always have had the impression that oral-theme day was the most dreaded period in the week, but, whether dreaded or not, it was evidently a day of great enjoyment as well. Or, perhaps, this sentiment is simply an expression from some of the graduates of the belief that more of this work in high school would have given them more confidence and poise in after years as well as real pleasure afforded them at the time.



In the fifth place, those teachers who have remained in the memory of the former pupil not only with affection but with the knowledge that he gained more and learned more through their instruction, are the teachers who were the real friends of the pupil, who showed a real interest in him, who looked upon him not as a scholar with a lesson to recite but as a human being who was looking to them for guidance and inspiration; while those teachers who were indifferent, who were even sarcastic, have never done anything with the mind of the pupil except leave in it, in the first instance, emptiness, and in the second, a bitter memory. When the teacher has tried to impress something upon the mind of the pupil by sarcastic and sneering remarks about his seeming stupidity, the pupil is not only humiliated and angry, but the information to be imparted is entirely forgotten, thereby creating two evils and gaining nothing. This word "sarcasm" was used so often it was quite evident that at some time or other nearly every man or woman, boy or girl, has had in certain cases the experience of disliking a teacher for remarks made and because of the realization of time lost in that particular classroom.

My last and most striking impression was this: In most cases, straight through the questionnaire, all are aware that a more thorough drilling in English grammar is necessary. I was pleased to find this record of opinion, for during the last two or three years I have myself been most conscious of this defect—a lack of the very fundamentals of the very language which I speak. I have found myself without confidence, relying, just as hundreds of others do, on my hearing to tell me whether I was making grammatical errors or not. I figured that probably the fact I had taken a course without any language whatever in it except English had a great deal to do with this—but even then I felt that that was a rather poor state of affairs when the studying of other languages was the chief means of understanding one's own. I remembered that practically during my entire four years of high school grammar had not been sufficiently stressed. My chief drill was in grammar school, when I was both too young and too giddy to absorb anything. You might say that I have

no reason to cry now if that is the case, that it was my own fault if I fooled my time away to such an extent in grammar school that many of the fundamentals of the English language were never properly rooted in my consciousness. You are, I admit, quite right. It was my fault—but is that just the way to look at it? I should never have the audacity to say that I know how this could have been done in high school or even suggest how it could be done; but it does seem to me that just a few minutes' drill every day, or even twice a week, during the four years of high school would be a tremendous benefit and assistance in the future life of the pupil. I would never be saying all this and at such length if I hadn't felt pretty keenly about it long before I ever saw this questionnaire, and when I realized that nearly all these men and women recognized the same need that I do—that more English grammar should be taught in the secondary school—I couldn't resist this personal comment.

This sums up, I think, my group of questionnaires, and an interesting lot they are. It is true, however, that there are many benefits in the high-school English course that have not been touched upon at all for the reason that there were no questions asked in regard to them. Among these benefits there is that intangible "something" which every one of these men and women is conscious of and is anxious to have continued. Perhaps it is the bringing to life of a desire for the real things in life, the more beautiful things, the desire for the true culture which is found in the reading and loving of the best books, the best poetry; it is perhaps an urge within him made stronger to continue forever improving himself, never to cheapen his awakened tastes for the best in literature, the best in everything; so, in whatever criticism he has made is reflected the desire to be of help in whatever small way he is able by cooperating with the teachers and with the schools in discarding that which is poor, in seeking out that which is good, until at last his ideal and their ideal is reached.

## THE REPORT FROM THE COLLEGE GROUP

GARDNER COWLES, JR.

Managing Editor of The Harvard Crimson

Some 315 students in New England colleges filled out the questionnaire. I bring to you the actual figures on the result and also several impressions which I gained from a careful survey of the papers. The students who filled out the questionnaire were about half boys and half girls. They prepared for college in approximately 100 different high and preparatory schools. This fact seems to me of especial importance. With over 100 high schools and preparatory schools represented, the results should show very conclusively how at least the majority of college students today regard the training in English in the secondary schools.

In taking up Question 1 on the paper, the first significant fact to be noted is that *spelling* and *punctuation* overwhelmingly lead all the rest in the number of A's received, thus showing that the former pupils regard those two as of primary importance. Nearly 200 marked spelling A.

More marked *paragraphs* either A or B than D or E, but the vote on each side of C almost balanced. There was no majority either way for *long themes*, *note-taking*, or *letters*. I am sorry to say that 225 considered *journalism* worth only a little attention or better omitted entirely.

In Group 2, 261 voted *grammar* important or very important. The vote on *word-study* and *paraphrasing* ran pretty evenly, the same number considering it important as considered it worth little attention.

In Group 3, *outside reading* was voted very important by a large majority; 263 gave it either an A or a B. The vote balanced both on *close study of texts* and on *history of literature*. But in the next five votes an interesting fact was disclosed. The majority of voters considered *novels* and *short stories* desirable, but not important, whereas *drama*, *poetry*, and *essays* were voted distinctly important. The relationship of these two votes is significant. The former students feel that drama, poetry, and essays (especially poetry) should receive more attention than should novels and short stories. This fact was very clear from the vote. *Periodicals* were voted



down as worth only a little attention. *Oration*s received likewise a distinct preponderance of D's and E's.

In Group 4, *oral composition* was voted as very important by a large majority. There was no marked feeling one way or the other on *reading aloud* and *debating*.

Class methods did not seem to interest all of the voters, but the result points to one or two facts. *Reading by teacher* was distinctly frowned upon by a large majority. And 177 out of a vote of 250 felt *silent reading* had better be omitted entirely. *Talks by teacher* were preferred to *reading by teacher*, but *discussion* alone was voted very important.

In the vote on the question "What results of your school work in English have proved of most value, which of least value, and which most interesting?" the results clearly show the former students agree on what the answer should be. The group headed "Practice in Writing" easily led all the rest in being considered most valuable. Reading came in a poor second, while "Practice in Speaking" came in last, being considered obviously least important. Of the individual topics, *reading*, *grammar*, and *long themes* were voted most valuable in the order named. *Word-study* and *close study of texts* both received a minus vote, that is, many more considered least valuable than considered them most valuable. In that category also fell *oration*s. No one considered *argument* most valuable while a good number considered it least valuable. *Outside reading* led as being most interesting, closely followed by *discussion*, then *drama*, then *poetry*. Few considered any of the topics under practice in speaking either valuable or interesting.

To the question, "Do the schools need more time for English?" the voters indicated their opinion with astounding clearness. To this question, 261 answers were obtained. Not a single one voted that English should be given less time; 201 voted that it should be given more time, and many of these underscored their answers. This result seems to me of vast importance.

In the case of the marking, the result was almost as clearly shown. 200 voted that the present marking is *about right*,

and only 6 out of 296 voted it *too severe*; 90 voted it *too lenient*.

According to the next vote, a teacher is most helpful by being able to give individual attention, is helpful secondly, by being of a nature to encourage by open-minded discussion, and thirdly, by exhibiting sympathy. The vote showed a teacher is hindered most by sarcasm. Wandering from the subject at hand is the second largest hindrance, closely followed by inflexible routine. Not a few mentioned that a teacher's greatest hindrance was illegible handwriting which made it impossible to read the corrections on the themes.

For the last year's work in English in the secondary schools, the former students would have one theme a week written outside of the classroom. The vote leaned toward two themes a week rather than toward one a fortnight. There was no sharp preference—for either long or short themes. The vote went in favor of narration and description. There were 201 who felt that the teacher should control and assist the pupil in this reading by correction of details; 114 felt the teacher could help most by giving encouragement.

For the *reading outside of the classroom*, the vote prescribed a book a fortnight. As subject matter for this reading, the novel was the overwhelming choice. The teacher should assist this reading by (1) book lists, and (2) reports. Each of these two methods received an overwhelming vote.

One fact was emphatically brought out in the third part of this question, which asked what should be the usual routine of the teacher in the classroom. Reading and discussion of themes by the teacher in the classroom had a two-to-one lead over lectures and explanation of lesson.

It was voted that the usual routine for the student in the classroom should be *reading aloud* and *oral composition*. This vote favoring reading aloud proves nothing as far as I can see except perhaps the imbecility of human nature. After voting that reading aloud is not of distinct importance, then they turn around and vote that it should be the usual routine of the student in the classroom. *Discussions* easily led as being the best occasional feature of the classroom routine.

Writing was voted the most important thing of all, with taste in reading the second most important. Only nine voted that preparation for college was the most important thing.

Now by the way of summary, let me mention what facts in the results seem to me, after carefully looking over all the answers, worthy of remembering:

In the first place, all of the former students want more time devoted to English in the secondary schools. This was clearly evident from every answer and every comment made on any of the questionnaires. Secondly, they want the emphasis laid on writing rather than on reading, detailed study, or speaking. Thirdly, they want more thorough instruction in and more time given to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

These former students want considerable outside reading done as well as outside writing. At least one theme a week should be handed in and at least one book should be read each two weeks. This outside reading the teacher should direct by book lists and by calling for reports.

No change in the present standard of marking should be made.

The teacher should strive to give considerable individual attention and should see to it that open-minded discussions are held in the classroom. The teacher should avoid sarcasm, wandering, and rigid routine. The student should be assigned more poetry, dramas, and essays than novels or short stories. There should be considerable oral composition in the classroom.

And lastly, the teacher should not spend too much time directly in preparing the student for college. For only a very, very few of the former students considered that important.

Those facts, brought out by this questionnaire seem to me worth remembering. And I hope they will prove of value to you.



## FROM THE TECHNICAL GROUP

H. L. SEAVER

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Our department spent an hour discussing the questionnaires, and got no farther than a first impression of chaos. Boys have pretty confused recollection of their school preparation, a recollection which is only in the case of the alerter boys discriminating. The report of the boys seemed at first to prove nothing, or anything; we said that any person with a grouch could take the questionnaires and prove whatever he wanted, up to the hilt. We sorted them into groups, of private and of public schools; of New England and of Western schools. That grouping, however, seemed to indicate nothing significant.

This afternoon, however, I put in a couple of hours on the papers; and I think some points emerge which may be of interest in connection with the reports which the other two speakers will make.

It was a little striking that no boys reported a need of reducing the time given to English; 25 per cent. of the students from schools outside New England advised more time; and 33 1/3 per cent. of the students from New England schools advised more time.

As was to be expected from undergraduates in an Engineering School, almost all my questionnaires reported that the composition subjects, written or oral, even grammar, were of greater value to them than the literary. There was very frequent protest against "close study of texts"; almost as frequent against all the poetry. Many objected to study of the language of Shakespeare. I think it is a little difficult to weigh the importance of this testimony. It is of course the fashion of boys to protest against the literary, the poetic, and the old—a kind of "pose" with them. Though I felt sympathy with the boy who said he objected to "minute study of phlegmatic literature," I cling deferentially to the opinion that Shakespeare was worth their while and that one must understand his language in order to understand him.

There was a rather disconcerting frequency of one particular comment in answer to the question: "What habits of

the teacher were a hindrance or discouragement?" This brought a chorus of plaintive or irritated protest against "Sarcasm,—often printed in capitals, underlined, or enforced with the exclamation points. A protest almost as frequent was "Fault-finding"; "Bawling us out"; "Trying to find what we *don't* know"; "Persistently quizzing me after it's plain I'm not prepared."

There was almost the same unanimity in response to the question: "What qualities of the teacher most helped you?" The answer was usually "Interest"; "Friendliness"; "Ability to get our point of view." "Being prepared on the lesson assigned" was a speech which gave my conscience how sharp a lash! Boys are terribly discerning in that regard. One paper answered: "Teachers should be in no case over forty-five years old; old teachers have old ideas."

To the question: "Was the marking too severe, too lenient, or about right?" there was an almost overwhelming reply: "About right." I think we have an immense reservoir of willingness on which we may draw.

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